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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 000124

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [ASEC](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [ZI](#) [MDC](#)
SUBJECT: GOZ CASTS MDC'S ZAMBIA EXCURSION AS USG PLOTTING

REF: (A) DERDERIAN-MOZENA 2/3 E-MAIL (B)
DAYTON-NEULING 2/2 E-MAIL (C) HARARE 112
(D) HARARE 74 (E) 05 HARARE 1681

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher Dell under Section 1.4 b/d

Summary

1. (C) Following Zambia's expulsion of a delegation of senior MDC officials on February 2 (refs A, B), Zimbabwe's state media has alleged that the U.S. Embassy had arranged a meeting in Zambia between the delegation and "officials from US-funded Freedom House". The articles appear to be part of a broader GOZ campaign to target Zimbabwe's democratic forces and our assistance to them. The allegations are false. In fact, there is currently no Freedom House program, though one has been proposed. That said, the articles are indicative of the extent to which the government fears our D/G program. We therefore recommend that discussion of the program be confined to classified means and that we seek a regional partner for Freedom House's putative program. We also recommend that the Department respond to press inquiries (Para 6). End Summary.

GOZ Allegations

2. (U) Under a February 5 headline "CIA behind MDC safari to Zambia", the GOZ-controlled Sunday Mail alleged that a "highly placed MDC source" confirmed that Morgan Tsvangirai and a group of senior party officials had gone to Zambia to meet officials of Freedom House (FH), which the paper alleged was US-funded and headed by "former CIA and FBI agents." The article, also alleged that the meeting, which involved a Kenyan named Samuel Mark Imende, had been arranged with the assistance of Embassy Harare. With a headline "Government probes MDC", the official Herald on February 6 featured Security/Lands Minister Didymus Mutasa outlining GOZ plans to launch an investigation.

3. (C) The articles appear to be the latest salvo in an escalating GOZ campaign against Zimbabwe's democratic opposition and our assistance to them. Starting with the heightened rhetoric of December's ZANU-PF National Conference (ref E) against NGOs, this campaign has seen arrests and death threats against prominent activists (refs C, D). In the media, it has meant stepped up coverage of alleged Western espionage and overseas "interference" in other countries' internal affairs, with particular attention paid to developments in Russia and the Russian government's impending crackdown on NGOs.

4. (C) We have not as yet been able to get a full readout from the MDC on what actually occurred in Zambia. The allegations as written are false. There is no FH program on Zimbabwe, although one has been proposed. The MDC was trying to arrange a meeting with its IRI media consultant, which at our suggestion they had agreed to hold outside of the country. However, the Kenyan with whom Tsvangirai and the MDC delegation allegedly met is unknown to us. It is possible that the GOZ heard something about FH from its MDC sources or from monitoring phone conversations and in this instance is conflating FH and IRI. It is also possible that the articles are total spin that accidentally came close to the mark.

Post Recommendations

5. (C) We have anticipated negative publicity of this sort with respect to our democracy and governance program for some time. While in this instance, the GOZ got it wrong, it highlights the extent to which they are tracking our support for Zimbabwe's democratic forces and underscores the importance of operational security when discussing the

proposed Freedom House program and other DG activities. We recommend that in future USG agencies avoid discussing these sensitive activities other than by classified means or face-to-face meetings. However, despite our best precautionary efforts, we can expect future GOZ efforts along these lines. With that in mind, we also recommend that we give serious consideration to partnering FH with a credible regional NGO, such as Idasa in South Africa, that is readily accepted by its local government and can help diffuse the U.S. role in support of Zimbabwe's civil society.

Press Guidance

16. (C) The allegations are drawing international press attention. We recommend that the Department issue a statement playing on the state media's long record of exaggeration and fabrication (USG responsible for HIV/AIDS, drought, etc.) in dismissing this latest effort. To that end we provide the following points:

-- Contrary to reports from Zimbabwe's state media, the U.S. Embassy was not involved in the arrangement of alleged meetings between the MDC and Freedom House in Zambia last week.

-- The Government-controlled media's charges are consistent with the regime's long-standing practice of fabricating stories about perceived enemies rather than addressing fundamental obligations of good governance.

-- We urge the Government to deal honestly with the nation's problems, engage all of Zimbabwe's democratic elements, and return to a path of international engagement that will permit us to work together to restore the suffering country's stability and prosperity.

-- (If asked) Consistent with applicable legal requirements, the USG supports a broad range of activities and organizations in Zimbabwe that advance democracy and rule of law.
DELL